SECTION IV

CONCERNING CERTAIN DETAILS IN THE APPLICATION OF TONE-INFLECTION AND THE BEARING OF TOUCH-TEACHING AND FINGERING, ETC., ON INTERPRETATION.

The importance of Rubato does not detract from the importance of tone and duration contrasts.

I HAVE here expatiated at such length on the subject of Rubato, and its application in Interpretation, because I have found that there is generally such extreme vagueness and misunderstanding with regard to these facts. But while Rubato is, as I have shown, such an indispensable factor in Interpretation, and calls for so much careful and detailed attention, this must not lead us to minimise the importance of other factors, such as those of Tone-contrast (those of Quantity as well as those of Quality), and those contrasts of Duration, which, whether obtained by finger or foot, are also, alas, so often lamentably overlooked — a point upon which I shall have more to say presently, under *Pedalling*.

Lack of tone-variety often not realised by the teacher.

The necessity for the application of all such colour-effects is patent to everyone who has the least claim to a musical ear. It is surprising, however, how frequently this imperative requirement of tone-inflection is, nevertheless, *overlooked* by the inexperienced teacher, and this, although he may be quite well aware of its importance! True, he hears (or sometimes does not hear!) that his pupil's performance is appallingly unmusical — sometimes enough to make him almost shriek with the downright misery of it — and the more musical he is himself, the greater the

misery for him. Yet he fails to observe the cause of his misery, fails to notice that his pupil's performance is either a mere stumbling, straight line of tone — totally devoid of any inflections; or else that it is far worse, and is strewn all over with supposed details of "expression," which are all diametrically opposed to musical sense.

I find many a supposed teacher continually experiencing this kind of torture without stirring a limb to save himself, or making any attempt to stave off at least *some* of this very real and intense suffering, but instead, accepting the situation "as one of the inevitable drawbacks of our profession!"

Need of accurate listening and analysing again demonstrated.

Of course, I should not say he "listens." Indeed, he does not listen any better than his pupil does; that is precisely where all the trouble begins, he merely "hears." He hears sufficiently to make him sick at heart, but he does not "listen" — *does not analyse* in the least what he is hearing.

Not to notice that the source of his discomfort may possibly be traced to the absence of any Rubato-inflections is perhaps excusable in a measure, since these inflections are comparatively subtle, and he may have been brought up in the notion that such devices must not be taught, are really "very sinful," and "only rarely" to be applied, and still more rarely so by children, and never in the music of a composer who has been dead for more than fifty years! But with regard to tone-inflections the case is different. Doubtless his up-bringing has insisted on the necessity of these, even with children, so there is really no excuse for his putting up with prison-like, brick walls of dull, uninflected sound, when perhaps, after all, only a little effort is required from him, to enable the hitherto "unmusical" pupil to supply the needful tone-inflections, and to apply

these correctly, thanks to a proper teaching of the analysis of Music, and of Touch. The Means and Laws of tone-inflection when thus taught, renders the teaching of Music no longer an extreme misery to the teacher, but an extreme delight to him, as it should be . . . not to speak of the revelation it will be to his pupils!

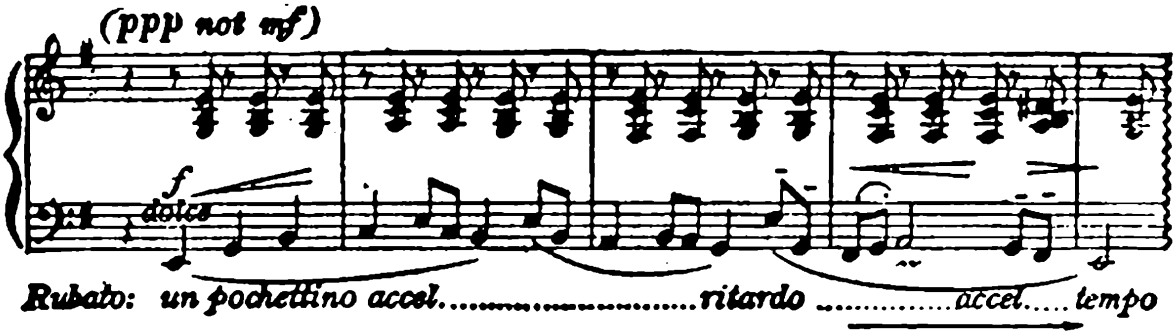
Want of true *pp* is mostly the cause of deficiency in colouring.

In this connection there is another point which is often overlooked by teachers. They *do* hear that the pupil is not giving sufficient variety of tone, but they try to make the correction at *the wrong end.* They try to insist on *more* tone for the accents and the *fortes*, whereas, all the time, the fault lies in the fact that the pupils never get within measurable distance of a true *piano*, not to speak of *pianissimo!* For instance, they will begin the "Moonlight" Sonata nearer *mf* than *pp*, thus: —

(The lecturer here played a few bars from the opening of Beethoven's Op. 27 in this way, and then with the correction; also he gave the Episode of Chopin's D flat Prelude, with its long *crescendo* from *pp*, in further illustration of this point.)

Or they play their accompaniments far too loudly. Let me give you a few bars from Schumann's Concertstück in G, illustrating this point, thus:

EXAMPLE 68.



After this it will not surprise you when I assert that deficiency in tone-colouring is mostly due to *lack of low tints.*

When you give your next lesson, just bear in mind what I have said, and you will find that your pupils are everywhere lavishly throwing their chances away, and are *wasting* tone, right and left! Say that a phrase comes out dull and uninteresting (even with a pupil who is trying to "scan" his phrases properly); in most cases you will find the fault is, that the pupil begins the phrase with as much tone as he *should reserve for its climax.*

Make him cut away the tone at the beginning of the phrase, and at once the phrase will stand out clear as a cameo.[1]

After a long note, the continuation of the same phrase is often played too loudly.

Another fault of tone-balance, frequent in passages consisting of notes of different lengths, is, after a long note in such a passage, to commence the *continuation with the same tone* that was given to the last long note. In properly playing such continuation, we should take care to give the note *which starts the continuation* with no more tone (or hardly more tone) than the last preceding long note *is actually* heard to give just before that continuation is due; otherwise the beginning of the continuation will inevitably sound like the beginning of a new phrase, and therefore "out of focus."[2]

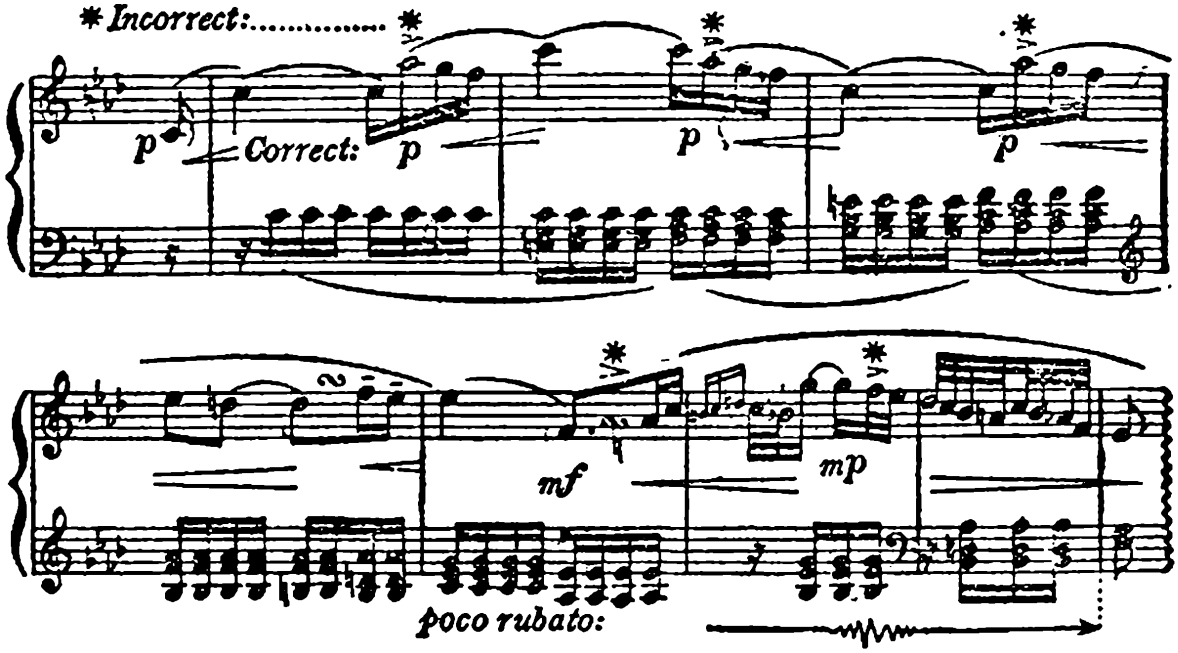
Cut away the tone to render certain notes prominent.

[1] A similar fault is apt to occur when trying to make a melody "stand out" above its accompaniment, or when one note of a chord has to be sounded more strongly than the others. Mistakenly, the player tries to give extra tone to these notes, instead of *cutting away* the tone of the others, and thus leaving the unsubdued notes prominent.

[2] Remember, the tone of the long note *decreases* from the moment of its percussion, onwards. *See* also Section III, page 75, *re* the treatment of passages consisting of notes of unequal lengths.

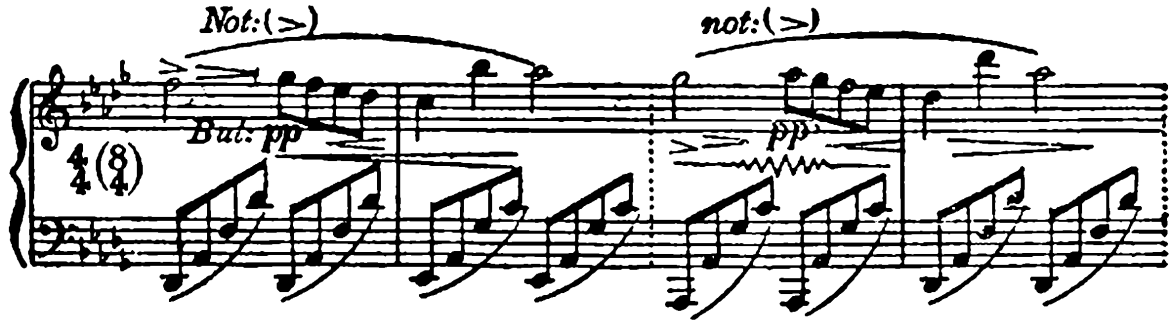
Let me give you an illustration or two on this point:

EXAMPLE 69. From the Adagio of the "Pathétique" Sonata.

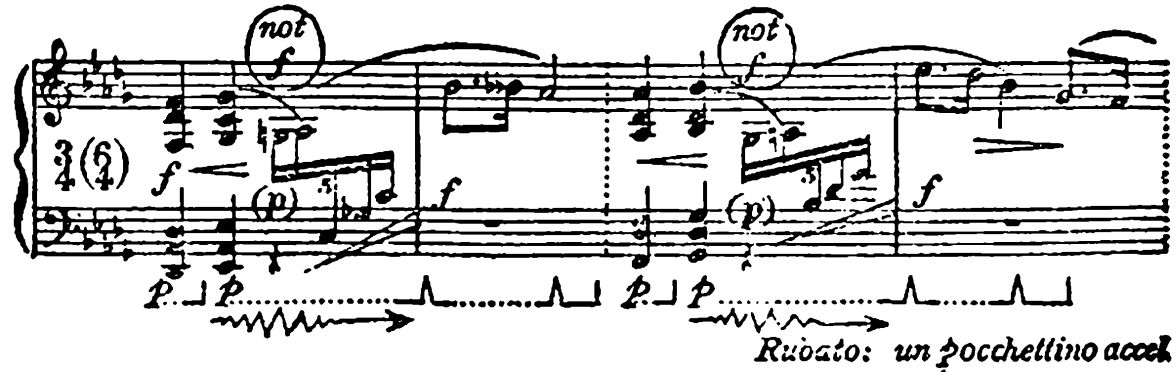


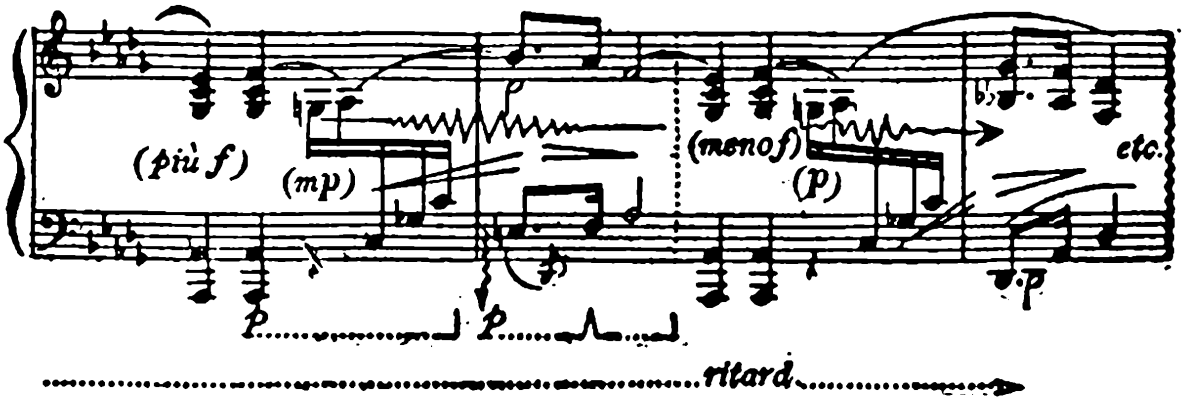
In the above example the notes marked with a cross must not be played with the same full tone as that given to the last preceding long note.

EXAMPLE 70. From Chopin's Funeral March.



EXAMPLE 71. From Chopin's Nocturne in F sharp minor.





The individualisation and balance of the constituent notes of chords, octaves, etc.

Another point with regard to tone-colouring, which requires constant judgement, is the balancing of the tone in chords, etc., — that is, the balancing of the tone of the several notes constituting each separate chord.[1]

Much variety of colouring is available by thus giving greater or less prominence to the upper part, or lower part, or inside notes of chords, etc. Every true artist, in fact, unconsciously chooses the colour for every note of every chord he plays.

Even in the case of a single octave, three quite distinct colourings can be given in this way; we can either make (*a*)

[1] Each note of every chord must indeed be *meant* as accurately as the note-details of every finger-passage. Do not play a chord as a lump of sound with the arm "dabbed" down upon the key-board, but instead, think of the three or four constituent sounds and fingers of each chord. *Will* the exact sound of each constituent note of each chord, its exact quantity and quality of tone, and its precise duration in each case. Chord passages, after all, are always "finger-passages" — in this sense, that the requisite fingers have to be called upon to do their work *individually*, each one in each chord, etc.

In this connection, the following is good exercise: hold a chord at key-*surface* level firmly (but loosely) by means of finger-force only, and *rotate* the forearm in the meantime both ways a few times, doing this *quite freely* while thus keeping hold of *all* the notes of the chord by the individual fingers — a capital "finger-individualisation" study. *See* also: Relaxation Studies," pp. 102 and 120, for similar exercises.

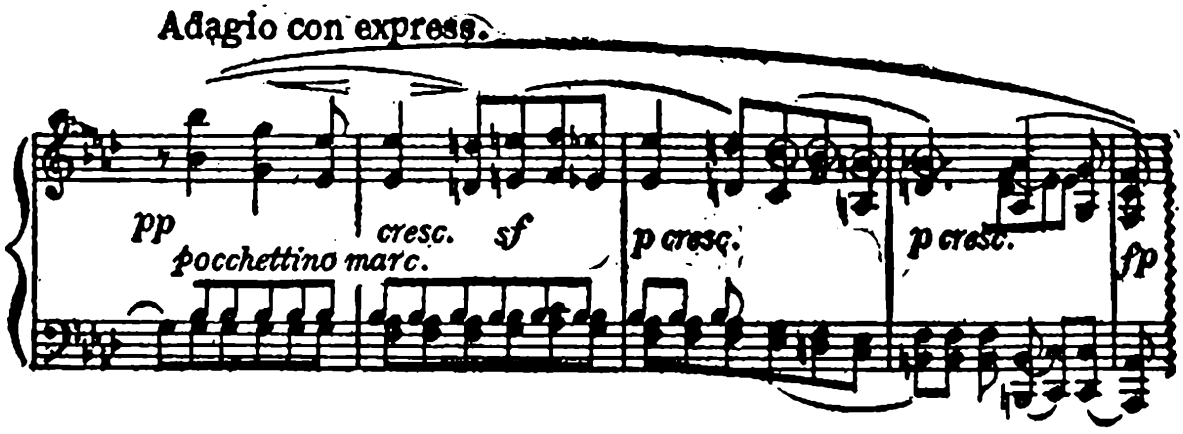
the upper note prominent, or (*b*) the lower note prominent, or (*c*) can give both with equal tone-amount; and octave passages, when thus differently coloured, have quite a different effect, musically.

(This was illustrated.)

To show you how much depends upon such means of colouring in octaves, etc., and the subtle effects thus available, I will play a few bars from the slow movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E flat, Op. 27.

I will play the octaves in the right hand, at first with *equal* tone for both the notes of the octave, then with the *lower* note more prominent, and then with the *upper* note more sung:

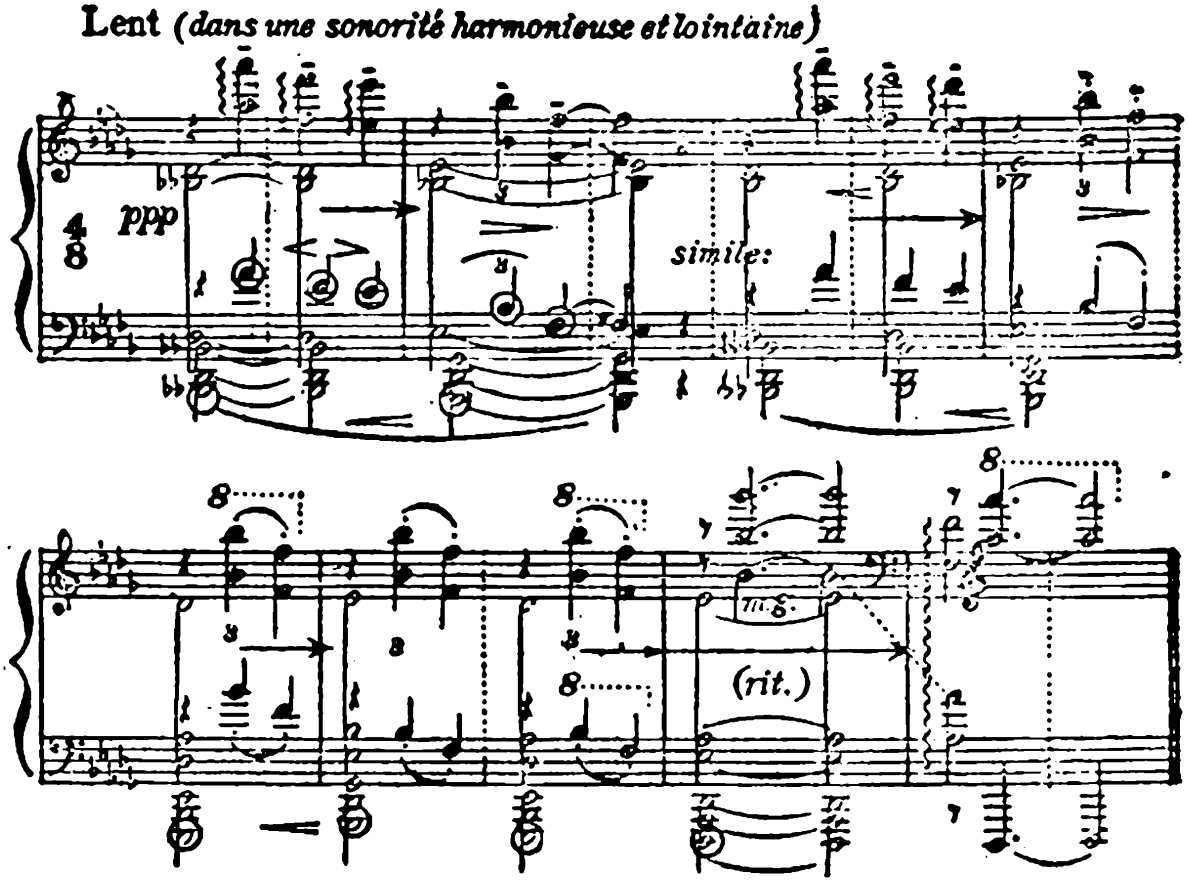
EXAMPLE 72*a*.



I will now play you as another example of similar colouring, the coda of Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau." The last two lines of this played with "solid" colour, would to my mind sound horrible. I prefer to play the right-hand part quite *ppp*, and in the left-hand the lowest note of the low chords more prominently — say *mp*, the upper notes *pp;* while the lowest note of the upper (trebled) accompanying

melody should again be rather prominent. You remember the passage:

EXAMPLE 72*b*.[1]



Hardly any two successive harmonies are played alike, in this sense, by a true artist or musical person — his sense of *harmonic* values and progressions will unconsciously guide him constantly to make subtle variations of tone-balance of the constituent notes of each chord or harmony.

As an example of such varied chord-colouring, I will play you the E minor Prelude of Chopin. Notice how the tone-balance in the soft accompanying chords must be constantly varied, by *prominentising* the interesting features

[1] By kind permission of MM. Durand et fils, Paris, publishers and proprietors.

of its harmonic progressions. This should be done, of course, so slightly and subtly as not to draw attention to this means of expression, as such. But I may have to exaggerate the point here, slightly, so as to make it plain to you.

(The lecturer here illustrated the Prelude in question.)

Less force required to produce the high notes than the low notes of the piano.

Still another point, often lost sight of by average players, sometimes even by those aspiring to the artist-status is, that far less force is required for the production of the high notes of the instrument, than that necessary to produce the middle or lower sounds. Such players fail to notice that the same force which will produce merely a pleasant *forte* in the bass of the piano, will produce a hideous shriek when applied to the high treble notes.

To convince the student on this point, show him how long and thick are the lower strings, and how thin and very short are the higher ones — the sounding part of the highest strings is only about two inches long! Hence, in playing a rising passage, which is meant to be of even tone, we must really play with a *decrescendo* of force, otherwise the highest notes will be of undue tone-value.[1]
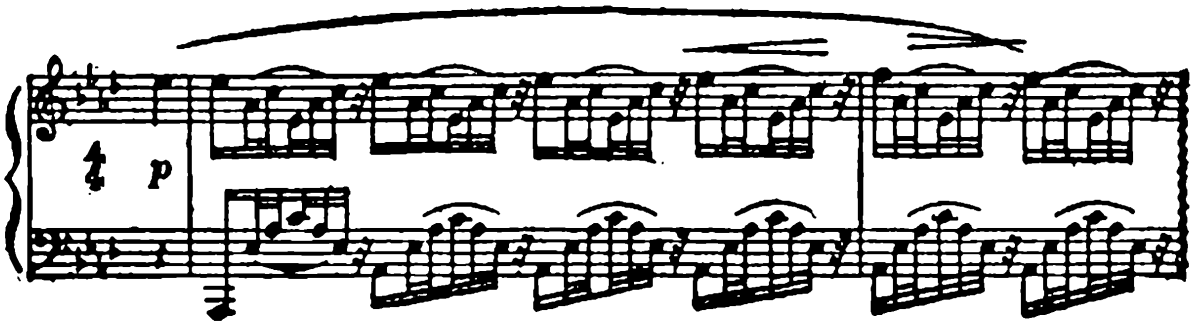
The tonal emphasising of melody notes should not lead to tasteless agoggic accents.

Under "Rubato" we saw how we could give emphasis to single notes by a slight "hanging round" them as to Time — that is, by "agoggic" or time-accents, given either *before* the sounding of such notes, or *after* sounding them. We must however, as a rule, guard against a tendency *always* to give such Rubato-accents just *because* we happen to wish to make the notes of a melody tonally prominent in passages where the accompaniment is played by the same

[1] Obviously, it requires far less force to move a thin string, only two inches in length, than to move the mass of a thick one, some six feet in length.
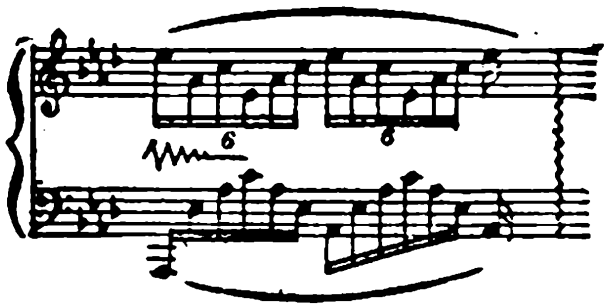
hand. This constitutes a fault in taste (or technique) often met with. Remember, to add a *rubato* leaning to notes already glaringly emphasised by their tonal contrast to the accompaniment is only likely to lead to a very mawkish effect. Therefore, do not play Chopin's A flat Study thus: —

EXAMPLE 73*a*.



But thus:

EXAMPLE 73*b*.



Here the flow of semiquavers (sixteenth notes) should remain quite uninterrupted, in spite of the sounding of the *tonally*-prominent melody notes and bass notes.

There is no difficulty in doing this, provided the laws as to the rotational action of the Forearm are obeyed — and provided, that the notes of the accompaniment are played with those keys partially lowered before their actual final swing-down in the act of tone-production.[1]

[1] *See* the author's "Some Commentaries on Pianoforte Playing," (Longmans), and "The Forearm Rotation Principle" (Williams).

The bearing of the teaching of Touch, etc., upon the teaching of Interpretation.

Now, with regard to the teaching of the *wherewithal* of Tone-contrasts — the teaching of Touch, Agility, Key-treatment, or whatever term you may prefer for this part of the subject, I need not go into these matters here, as I have been sufficiently explicit about them elsewhere — and at great length! It goes without saying, that during the teaching of Interpretation, I insist that it is necessary all the time to pay close attention, and to render the minutest obedience to those laws of key-treatment and laws of muscular action and inaction, which have been formulated in my various books on Technique and Touch.[1]

Command over interpretation implies command over technical resources.

Unless the teacher is fully alive to the bearing of these Laws,—and this, during every minute of his teaching hours, he is not "teaching" Pianoforte-playing at all, in the true sense of that word; for he is certainly not "helping his pupils to learn," but is merely *telling them to learn*, which is a totally different thing.

Obedience to the laws of touch and technique must constantly be insisted upon.

The truly conscientious teacher indeed not only diagnoses every detail of Rubato-inflection, but diagnoses also every fault of Tone-inflection, every fault in duration, every sign of weakness as regards Agility; and, whenever any of these faults are traceable to disobedience to the Laws of Touch, he, in each and every case, explains these laws and processes to the pupil — while taking care in the meantime that the immediate musical purpose is never lost sight of. This he does, so that the pupil himself may learn to know *how* to correct such faults directly in the future — if he will but

[1] Works which had been overdue for a century or more; therefore the reader is here referred to the author's "Act of Touch," to the School book, "First Principles," and to their Supplement: "Some Commentaries on Pianoforte Playing" (Longmans). Also: "Relaxation Studies" (Bosworth); "A Child's First Steps," and "The Forearm Rotation Principle," etc. (Joseph Williams, and the Boston Music Co.).

take the trouble to do so. In this way the pupil gradually learns how every inflection and gradation of Tone and Duration, and Speed-requirement is physically producible, and producible with absolute certainty.

In this year of grace, in this country at least,[1] where such "direct" teachings have already become practically compulsory through public opinion, it is unnecessary to point out that this "direct" teaching of the essentials of Key-treatment is not only as important to the Pianist-student as the teaching of Interpretation and Music, but that it is really *far more* important to him. In this respect even Germany, which has stood still for so many years, complacently and with such thoroughness insisting on the interminable exercise-grinding and other monumental blunders of certain of her schools, even Germany is at last awakening. As I have already pointed out elsewhere,[2] healthily revolutionary writers there are now trying, with trenchant pen, to bring their country up-to-date and to her senses with regard to more common-sense methods of teaching Technique and Touch. These German teachings, although still tentative and erroneous in a measure, are at least similar in *tendency* to those of ours, now so long established and accepted here in England and elsewhere.[3]

[1] In Great Britain.

[2] *See* "Some Commentaries on Pianoforte Playing."

Knowledge of the laws of touch and technique necessary even to the beginner.

[3] Even with the beginner, even with the child, must these teachings of Touch or Technique be insisted upon. It is easier to learn aright in the first stages than later on, when various preconceptions and wrong habits of mind and body prove to be severe stumbling blocks and barriers difficult to surmount.

Harm only will result from practice unless the beginner understands at least the laws *as to the key itself*. For instance, he must understand that he can only direct and produce tone by a careful "aiming" of the key itself — each time for each note; that key-speed *is* tone, and that no

As with the beginner, so with the advanced performer, while you are teaching the interpretation of Music, you must meanwhile always insist on an accurate obedience to all the laws of Touch, for on such obedience does accuracy in Interpretation intimately depend.

Points as to touch requiring constant reminder.

True, later on in the student's and artist's work, many of these laws of Touch-procedure require but little reminder, provided they have been thoroughly mastered; that is, provided the correct actions have been made into unshakable habits. But there are always some particular points which nevertheless require constant reminder, even with the best players; and an unremittingly close and unswerving attention is therefore here required from the teacher, pupil, and artist.

Let me go over these points; there are *four* such that seem to stand out beyond all others; two are concerned with the key itself, and two with the muscular apparatus.

With regard to the KEY: *firstly*, during performance, as I have just said, we must insist on that constant observation of key-resistance (before and especially *during* the key's descent) without which aspect of attention we cannot arrive anywhere near an accurate expression (or presentation) of what we may feel or see *musically*. With regard

further tone can be produced, once the hopper has fulfilled its mission; i.e., that sounds must be made through a purposed, felt and carefully directed key-motion, each one accurately timed. Even points of mere elementary knowledge such as these will save him years of time, otherwise wasted in the unlearning of wrong habits. Moreover, he cannot get much further, unless he also has *some* notion as to the function of Armweight, and its almost complete elision between the successive tone-makings; and he must, besides this, have a very solid understanding of the function of Forearm Rotation, and how constant changes in such rotary-activity are required of him — required indeed for each note, even when he grapples with his first five finger exercise.

to the KEY: *secondly*, we must constantly insist on accuracy in "aiming" each key-descent; that is, we must insist on accuracy *in timing the completion* of each key-descent, and without which aspect of attention, again, we shall lose all accuracy of expression, and also all Agility-ease, and control over Duration.[1]

With regard to the MUSCULAR PROBLEM, the whole here resolves itself ultimately into *freedom of action*, and the two points which for this reason imperatively demand constant attention and reminder are: *firstly*, insistance on a real freedom of the whole arm in all passages requiring Weight during the moment of tone production, and the real elision of all "down-arm" force (and excessive weight) between the successive acts of tone production — that insistence upon the freely-poised arm, without which, true Agility ever remains impossible. *Secondly*, insistence on the always carefully applied Forearm-rotatory actions, inaccuracy in which respect will vitiate practically every note we play.

Musical and technical attention must never be allowed to flag, while giving attention to the details of muscular education.

Here I must re-iterate once again the warning which I have so often urgently insisted upon, that in learning and teaching the wherewithal of Technique or Touch, the *purpose* of such learning must never be lost sight of for a moment.[2] At the Piano, the pupil must never, even for a moment, be allowed to think of a muscular action (however necessary) *apart from the musical sense of the notes he is sounding.* The necessary trend of the mind must always be: (*a*) "Musical sense tells me this note must sound *then*, and *thus*"; and (*b*) "I must be sure to feel the resistance of the key during its down-movement so that I shall be able to give

[1] *Vide* "Act of Touch" and "First Principles" for the various warnings given under this head, especially pages 125 and 126 of the last-named work; also "Child's First Steps" pages 2 and 19.

[2] We need not think of timing the *beginning* of the act of key-descent, but we *must* think of timing key-descent to *end* at the right moment.

the required tone, rightly timed"; and finally, (*c*) "the muscular requirements are such-and-such to enable me to succeed in this." That is, the *mental impetus* is in this order: "Time-spot — Tone-kind — Key-need — Muscular-fulfilment." It is but *one flash of thought*, thus built up. In the end, Musical-feeling and Intelligence must automatically prompt the taking of all these precautions, and it seems but one act of consciousness — this giving oneself up to musical feeling, emotion, rhythmical impulse and key requirements. Nevertheless, *timing* and *feeling* can never become an automatic act. It is always the act of consciousness itself which makes Music through these, and there is no real music without such, as there is no act of conscious thought without a *timing* of it. *See also*, pp. 33 Text, 41 Note, 57 Text, and Section VI.

The bearing of fingering on Interpretation, and the learning of its laws.

Closely connected with the question of Touch itself is that of FINGERING. The older, and now out-of-date teachers of course placed an absurdly high value on this department of their work, and in fact seemed to rely on it as a cure for all ills — and some modern artists still exhibit the same failing. Granted, when your technique is inefficient, or your knowledge of its Laws is inadequate, that choice of fingering assumes a vast importance, since it then often means the difference between *barely* managing to negotiate a passage, and not being able to encompass it at all. With proper teaching, however, and knowledge of the *physical causes* which render a passage "difficult" or the reverse, choice of fingering is found to become a matter of quite secondary importance, since a far greater number of optional fingerings become practicable where the technical habits are good. I have noted the main LAWS OF FINGERING in my "Relaxation Studies," and in the special

Fingering, also, must not be "crammed."

excerpt from that book, published separately.[1] I need not therefore go into these matters here, except to refer to one point there noted, and that is, that great care must be exercised in Fingering as everywhere else, to guard against a mere cramming of "things," in place of a true teaching of abiding principles, and the nature of the facts concerned. Thus, in merely jotting down the required fingering for the pupil without comment or explanation, you are not giving him any real education; it is of no permanent value to the pupil to tell him merely to "put the thumb here," or "the fifth finger there "

Its proper teaching.

No, instead of merely writing down the fingering of a passage, you must always explain *why* it is chosen, and *how* the choice is arrived at. The main principle which you must here make clear to your pupil, is, that choice of fingering consists in selecting such finger-*groups* which will most easily lie over the piano-keys concerned, while at the same time giving due consideration to the necessity of joining such fingering-groups each one to the next or preceding one, by means of the cementing action provided by the passing-over or under of the thumb and other fingers.

The memorising of fingering.

The pupil will have no difficulty in *remembering* his fingerings, once he grasps the fact, that it is not *this* finger or *that* finger which matters, but that it is always a finger-group which is in question — either a complete group or an incomplete one. In a word, the act of memorising fingering consists in *associating* a certain set of fingers with a certain set of notes; this precisely defines the process, which is therefore an act of *mental association* like every other form of memorising.

Besides thus rendering it easy for the pupil to memorise fingerings, and thus to speed-up the learning of passages,

[1] "Fingering and Pedalling," London, Bosworth and Co.

such rational teaching will at the same time ensure his learning how to set about the CHOICE OF FINGERING for himself. This is an important point, since it is far more easy to choose satisfactory fingering for oneself than to have this done by anyone else — however expert the editor or teacher. Each individual hand has its own idiosyncracies; therefore, fingering chosen by another person cannot be so appropriate as that of one's own choice, always provided, of course, that one has acquired the requisite mastery over this subject.

For instance, in teaching the scale fingerings, do not tell your pupil where the thumb or other separate finger has to go, but at once show him that all scales consist of *two groups* of fingerings, a long one and a short one — the actual *lie* of these two groups being determined for each particular scale by the position of the black keys, and by the necessity of choosing the easiest positions for turning the thumb under, etc.

In the diatonic scale, for instance, we have the two groups: $\overset{\frown}{123}$ and $\overset{\frown}{1234}$, these two sets of finger-groups being then mentally (and tonally) connected with the sets of three or four notes which they respectively cover, in each scale, the fingering and the notes of the scale are thus simultaneously memorised.[1]

[1] I consider it best to finger Double Thirds scales similarly in *two groups*, a long one and a short one; viz.: R. H. $\begin{cases}2345\\1123\end{cases}$ and $\begin{cases}345\\234\end{cases}$.

See "Double Thirds scales, their fingering and mastery" (Joseph Williams), where I have carried out this principle.

The repeated thumb presents no difficulty, unless one suffers from the vicious habit of "key-bedding;" and *legato* is less imperfect with this fingering than with the old-fashioned three finger-groups in one octave.

(The lecturer here illustrated this point, by taking the scale of E flat, and showing where the two finger-groups occur in this scale, the place depending not on the key-note, but on the position of the black keys relatively to the white ones.)

By thus learning where the *whole* finger-group each time lies over the key-board, we necessarily also learn the place for each individual finger. To try to learn fingering in the opposite way—from the other end, as separate fingers first—is impracticable, and in any case we shall certainly not succeed in remembering *where* such separated fingers occur, until we do notice *where* the complete finger-note-group lies.